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Physical Activity Gets a Workout During National Arthritis Month

South Central District Health, in conjunction with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is promoting a new campaign in May during National Arthritis Month. The campaign, titled "Physical Activity -- The Arthritis Pain Reliever," encourages people with arthritis to participate in some sort of physical activity to help manage their pain.

A study released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shocked the arthritis community by revealing that 70 million, or one in three, adults in the United States suffer from arthritis and/or chronic joint symptoms. The previous estimate, made in 1997, listed 43 million Americans with arthritis. For many years, it was believed that physical activity would do more harm than good for people with arthritis by damaging joints, but recent studies show the opposite is true. Studies show that moderate physical activity actually helps people with arthritis.

Arthritis is the leading cause of disability in the United States and although cost-effective interventions are available to reduce the burden of arthritis, they are currently underused. Besides the physical toll, arthritis costs the country nearly \$65 billion annually. Rates of arthritis are higher among women, older persons, rural populations, and those with low education or low income.

With fitness in mind, South Central District Health, Bridgeview Estates, and the Twin Falls Senior Center are working together to bring a fitness class to arthritis sufferers in the Magic Valley. The three organizations offer the Arthritis Foundation's PACE (People with Arthritis Can Exercise) program every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. at the Twin Falls Senior Center on Shoshone Street. There is no charge for the on-going class.

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Registration is not required ahead of time for this class. Interested people are encouraged to just stop by the Senior Center when they are ready to start the class. For more information, call Tami Pearson at 736-3933.

The Arthritis Foundation's Aquatics course is also being offered locally. This course is offered for a small fee, five days a week at the City Pool. For more information about the class, call Tami Pearson at 736-3933 or Joy Crist at 737-2126.

Retirement Doesn't Mean Retiring from Exercise

When retirement age rolls around, many people think that this is the time to ease up and take it easy. This philosophy can lead to more rapid physical decline and frailty than is necessary. According to the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, much of the physical frailty attributed to aging is actually the result of muscular disuse and poor diet. Even though a body does go through a certain amount of decline as it ages, proper attention to physical activity and fitness levels will prevent, halt, or even reverse physical decline.

"We are a nation in pain. Arthritis is the number one cause of disability and affects more people than ever imagined. It's time we individually and as a society fully realize the seriousness of arthritis and take action to limit its impact," said Tino J. Mantella, president and CEO of the Arthritis Foundation. "What may start as minor aches and pains today, could end up affecting your future ability to enjoy everyday activities you love, including work, family, hobbies, and recreation."

"While this news is certainly serious, it is not hopeless," said Susie Beem, Arthritis Coordinator for South Central District Health. "There are things you can do to not only minimize the effect of arthritis, but to minimize your risk for arthritis. These basic steps are the place to start: maintain an appropriate weight and lose weight as needed; exercise to maintain fitness and flexibility; and seek early diagnosis and treatment to prevent joint damage, disability, and ensure an active life. Research also suggests that early diagnosis and appropriate management of arthritis (i.e., physical activity and maintaining an appropriate weight) can increase quality of life."

"Use It Or Lose It"

Muscle tissue within the human body has been designed to be used and worked in order to stay strong and healthy. The old adage "use it or lose it" is applicable when speaking about the

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need to use the muscles in our bodies. The body has also been made to expend a certain amount of energy on a daily basis in order that all the body systems keep working at an optimum level.

Statistics suggest that in the United States, health care costs associated with technology-induced inactivity are now approaching \$1 trillion per year. Very few careers or household activities these days provide enough energy expenditure to meet the human body's optimum energy expenditure levels. Pushing a button to open a garage door, automatic dishwashers, automatic car washes, trash cans with wheels, desk jobs with little physical motion throughout the day, drive-through windows where high-calorie, high-fat foods are served, etc., contribute little to meet that energy expenditure level that we all need to maintain a fit and healthy body.

"In and of themselves these things are not bad," said Tami Pearson, Lifestyles Coordinator of health and fitness programs for Bridgeview Estates, "but if we don't pay attention to the necessary energy output that the body requires, we as a society pay a huge price for our inactivity. Serious health issues such as arthritis, obesity, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, certain colon cancers, and more can be directly linked to our inactive lifestyle and poor nutritional choices. Many of these health issues are rapidly on the rise and quickly becoming epidemic."

The *Healthy People 2000* review states that sedentary lifestyles for older people have their functional mobility dangerously close to their maximum ability level.

"Climbing stairs or getting out of a chair, for example, often require near maximum efforts for older people who are not very physically active," said Pearson. "Any further decline or small physical setback could easily cause them to move from independent to disabled status in which assistance is needed for daily activities."

The Surgeon General has issued a report warning people – including older adults – that physical inactivity is a major risk to their health. *The United States Surgeon General's Report* concluded that regular physical activity has important positive effects on the musculoskeletal, cardiovascular, and endocrine systems.

The *World Health Organization's Guidelines for Promoting Physical Activity Among Older Persons* strongly endorses physical activity. The guidelines conclude that there is now compelling evidence that regular physical activity can assist in avoiding, minimizing, and/or reversing many of the physical, psychological, and social hazards that often accompany advancing age.

Short- and Long-Term Benefits of ‘Getting Physical’

Short-term physiological (physical) benefits of physical activity for older people include better-regulated blood sugar level, increased “feel-good” endorphin levels, and enhanced sleep quality and quantity. Long-term physical benefits of physical activity are crucial to independence and “successful” aging. There are substantial improvements in almost all aspects of cardiovascular functioning. Muscle strengthening exercises have been shown to have a significant impact on the maintenance of independence for the older adult. Exercise that stimulates movement through the range of motion assists in the preservation and restoration of flexibility. Regular activity helps prevent and/or postpone the age-related declines in balance and coordination that are major risk factors for falls. Behavioral slowing is a characteristic of advancing age. Individuals who are regularly active can often postpone these age-related declines.

Some of the short-term psychological benefits of physical activity include enhanced relaxation, reduced stress and anxiety, and elevated mood. Long-term benefits give participants positive consequences. Improvements in almost all aspects of psychological functioning have been observed following periods of extended physical activity. Regular exercise can make an important contribution in the treatment of several mental illnesses, including depression and anxiety neuroses. Regular physical activity may help postpone age-related declines in central nervous system processing speed and improve reaction time. Regular activity helps prevent and/or postpone the age-associated declines in both fine and gross motor performance. New skills can be learned and existing skills refined by all individuals, regardless of age.

Short-term social benefits of physical activity are also important. A large proportion of the older adult population voluntarily adopts a sedentary lifestyle, which eventually threatens to reduce independence and self-sufficiency. Participation in appropriate physical activity can help empower older individuals and assist them in playing a more active role in society. Physical activity programs, particularly when carried out in small groups and/or in social environments, enhance social and intercultural interactions for many older adults. Long-term social benefits of physical activity make it less likely for older adults to withdraw from society, more likely to stimulate new friendships and acquaintances, and provide individuals with an opportunity to widen available social networks. Participating in physical activity helps foster the stimulating

environments necessary for maintaining an active role in society, as well as for acquiring new roles, plus there is an increased chance for intergenerational contact, thereby diminishing stereotypical perceptions about aging and the elderly.

Growing old gracefully and successfully requires a great deal of hard work. All people, those with arthritis and those who do not experience this debilitating disease, should realize that physical activity plays a key role in staying young.

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